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STATINTL

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM ABC World News Tonight STATION WJLA-TV
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SUBJECT Reaction to William Casey's Death

PETER JENNINGS: Despite what already appeared to be thorough hearings, it is now a real possibility that some details of the Iran-Contra affair will never be revealed. The former CIA Director William Casey had a very significant role in helping to supply the Contras, and this morning Mr. Casey died of pneumonia, some months after the surgery to remove a cancerous brain tumor.

Casey had a long career in government.

Here's ABC's John Martin.

JOHN MARTIN: William Casey died in the middle of the biggest battle of his long career in public life, the Iran-Contra investigation. This morning the investigating committee's chairman said farewell.

SENATOR DANIEL INOUE: Whatever may be the final judgment of his role in this event, it should not obscure Mr. Casey's distinguished record of commitment to this country.

MARTIN: In York, Pennsylvania, the President saluted him for his personal sacrifice.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: We've lost a very devoted friend and a great public servant.

MARTIN: Casey's first taste of government came in war, running secret missions against the Nazis in World War II. Later he became a tax lawyer and wrote five books and ran the Securities and Exchange Commission, was President of the Export-Import Bank, a presidential consultant on intelligence and arms control.

WILLIAM CASEY: I feel very strongly that this country is in trouble. That needs to be turned around.

MARTIN: To help do that, Casey took over the CIA after managing President Reagan's campaign in 1980. He revived the agency from surveillance scandal and cutbacks in the '70s and raised its budgets. But his critics blamed him for embroiling the U.S. in covert warfare against Nicaragua, sometimes pushing to the edge of legality, and perhaps beyond.

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: Bill Casey never liked the law. He tried to find every way to get around the law, and at the same time build up a strong CIA.

MARTIN: But Casey excluded key members of Congress from vital information.

In public, he defended himself this way:

CASEY: One of the great paradoxes of this business is that successes have to go unheralded. You can't talk about it.

MARTIN: In the end, Casey was stricken by failing health and known for impatience at rules blocking what he believed needed to be done.

WILLIAM COLBY: You don't win them all, by any means. But I think, on balance, he did a very fine job as Director.

MARTIN: But he also suffered embarrassments: a CIA defector, a CIA spy's suicide, a KGB agent who redefected, the Sandinista assassination manual, the Iran arms deal.

Finally, its suspicions aroused, Congress began trying to find out just how deeply he was involved.

What will go unanswered from Casey is his direct role, if any, in supplying the Contras and selling arms to Iran.

SENATOR LEAHY: Some of what he knew, he took to the grave with him.

MARTIN: So, ironically, William Casey leaves behind an extraordinary career, punctuated in its final moments by an enormous question mark.

JENNINGS: The FBI Director, William Webster, has hit another road [sic] on his path to becoming the new director of the CIA. Senator Ernest Hollings said today he's going to hold up a vote on Webster's nomination. The reason: Hollings believes the FBI is not vigorously investigating State Department responsibilities for the embassy security problems in Moscow.